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INTERVIEW BETWEEN PRESIDENT KENNEDY
AND WALTER CRONKITE (CBS)

MR. CRONKITE: How seriously do you think this civil rights situation is going to affect your chances, assuming you will be the nominee of the Democratic Party next year in 1964?

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: Well, obviously it is going to be an important matter. It has caused a good deal of feeling, I suppose, against the Administration in the South -- also, I suppose, in other parts of the country. Whenever you have an issue upon which people feel so strongly, quite obviously it has its political effects so I would say it would be an important matter.

On the other hand, I am hopeful that both parties, Republicans and Democrats, will commit themselves to the same objective of equality of opportunity. I would be surprised if the Republican Party which, after all, is the party of Lincoln and is proud of that fact as it should be, I would be surprised if they did not also support the right of every citizen to have equal opportunities, equal chance under the Constitution.

There is no sense in blaming it, of course, on Washington. That is the convenient place to blame it and I suppose that is one of the reasons why we are there, but this is a problem that goes into every community across the country, every family and everyone has to make a decision. It is going to take time. I think it is finally going to be done but we are trying to do something much more difficult than any other country has ever done. A good many people who have advised us so generously abroad have no comprehension of what a difficult task it is that faces the American people in the '60's, but I think that the United States Government, I believe that both parties, and I believe that the great mass of opinion is in favor of making progress along these lines. And of course the most important area is finally going to be education which ties into jobs.

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MR. CRONKITE: Do you think you will lose some southern states in '64?

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: I lost some in '60 so I suppose I will lose some, maybe more in '64, I don't know. It is too early to tell but I would think -- I am not sure that I am the most popular political figure in the country today in the South, but that is all right. I think that we will have to wait to see a year and a half from now -- a year now. It is not that long.

MR. CRONKITE: Are you making any estimate as to who your opponent might be in '64?

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: No, there are a good many of them. There are a good many of them.

MR. CRONKITE: Do you have any choice as to who you would like to run against, either to put the issues before the people or otherwise?

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: No. That is a great mistake. I know some Republicans chose me in '60 as their favorite candidate so I don't think I can choose anybody. I will let them choose.

MR. CRONKITE: Mr. President, this, after all, is Labor Day and there are almost 5 million Americans who don't have really too much to celebrate this Labor Day. It is another day of unemployment for them. Do you see any real hope in a booming economy where we still have to have this many unemployed, that in the next, say, five years, a second term for you, for instance, we can find a solution to this problem?

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: There is no magic solution that suddenly is going to emerge. What it is, it seems to me, is a combination of actions which we are trying to take. What we have to realize is that to even stand still, stay still, we have to move very fast. We have 2-1/2 million more people working than when I came to office and yet a million and a half more people have come into the labor market.

The answer, it seems to me, lies in a whole variety of programs. The tax cut, I think, is most important. That would be an \$11 billion tax cut in a period of 18 months. We are not doing this just because -- though, of course, everybody would like to have their taxes reduced, but the major reason is because the lift it will give the economy, the assurance it will give us against another recession.

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So, in answer to your question, I believe that with the combination of the tax cut plus these other programs we can reduce that unemployment from the 5-1/2 percent.

Most importantly, we can prevent it from being increased and I think we can get it under five percent in the period of two years, 2-1/2 years, but we can't do it by just saying it will be done on its own. Too many people are coming into the labor market and too many machines are throwing people out.

MR. CRONKITE: Mr. President, speaking of Congress, the atom test ban treaty comes up to the Senate in the next few days and everybody is predicting as I believe you are, that it is going to pass by a very good majority, but as all of the argument about it, discussion about it and even suggestions from high places including former President Eisenhower, have a reservation on the treaty.

Do you think that this has hurt the spirit that prevailed in getting this treaty in the first place?

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: No, if the treaty is not substantial enough to stand discussion and debate, then, of course, it isn't a very good treaty. I think what would be most desirable is after all of this discussion and debate then to get a very strong vote in the Senate. I think a reservation would be a great mistake. I don't think President Eisenhower used the reservation in the formal sense that he wanted the Senate of the United States to put a reservation on the treaty because that would mean that the treaty would have to be renegotiated. He was concerned that we would make it very clear that we had the right to use nuclear weapons in time of war. Well, of course we do have that right. We have stated it. The committee report of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will restate it, so I think that that will deal with the problem that concerned him. Otherwise, I think a reservation which would require us to renegotiate the treaty with nearly a hundred countries, in my opinion it would be better to defeat the treaty.

MR. CRONKITE: Mr. President, the only hot war we've got running at the moment is of course the one in Vietnam, and we have our difficulties there, quite obviously.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: I don't think that unless a greater effort is made by the Government to win popular support that the war can be won out there. In the final analysis, it is their war. They are the ones who have to win it or lose it. We can help them, we can give them equipment, we can send our men out there as advisors, but they have to win it, the people of Viet Nam, against the Communists.

We are prepared to continue to assist them, but I don't think that the war can be won unless the people support the effort and, in my opinion, in the last two months, the government has gotten out of touch with the people.

The repressions against the Buddhists, we felt, were very unwise. Now all we can do is to make it very clear that we don't think this is the way to win. It is my hope that this will become increasingly obvious to the government, that they will take steps to try to bring back popular support for this very essential struggle.

MR. CRONKITE: Do you think this Government has time to regain the support of the people?

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: I do. With changes in policy and perhaps with personnel I think it can. If it doesn't make those changes, I would think that the chances of winning it would not be very good.

MR. CRONKITE: Hasn't every indication from Saigon been that President Diem has no intention of changing his pattern?

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: If he does not change it, of course, that is his decision. He has been there ten years and, as I say, he has carried this burden when he has been counted out on a number of occasions.

Our best judgment is that he can't be successful on this basis. We hope that he comes to see that, but in the final analysis it is the people and the government itself who have to win or lose this struggle. All we can do is help, and we are making it very clear, but I don't agree with those who say we should withdraw. That would be a great mistake. That would be a great mistake. I know people don't like Americans to be engaged in this kind of an effort. Forty-seven Americans have been killed in combat with the enemy, but this is a very important struggle even though it is far away.

We took all this--made this effort to defend Europe. Now Europe is quite secure. We also have to participate--we may not like it--in the defense of Asia.

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MR. CRONKITE: Mr. President, have you made an assessment as to what President de Gaulle was up to in his statement of Viet Nam last week?

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: No. I guess it was an expression of his general view, but he doesn't have any forces there or any program of economic assistance, so that while these expressions are welcome, the burden is carried, as it usually is, by the United States and the people there. But I think anything General de Gaulle says should be listened to, and we listened.

What, of course, makes Americans somewhat impatient is that after carrying this load for 18 years, we are glad to get counsel, but we would like a little more assistance, real assistance, but we are going to meet our responsibility anyway.

It doesn't do us any good to say, "Well, why don't we all just go home and leave the world to those who are our enemies."

General de Gaulle is not our enemy. He is our friend and candid friend -- and, there, sometimes difficulty -- but he is not the object of our hostility.

MR. CRONKITE: Mr. President, the sending of Henry Cabot Lodge who after all has been a political enemy of yours over the years at one point or another in your career, and his, sending him out to Saigon might -- raise some speculation that perhaps you are trying to keep this from being a political issue in 1964.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: No. Ambassador Lodge wanted to go out to Saigon. If he were as careful as some politicians are, of course, he would not have wanted to go there. He would have maybe liked to have some safe job, but he is energetic and he has strong feelings about the United States and, surprisingly as it seems, he put this ahead of his political career. Sometimes politicians do those things, Walter.

MR. CRONKITE: Thank you very much, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY: And we are fortunate to have him.

MR. CRONKITE: Thank you, sir.

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